

March 5, 1999

The thing is the Joker always knew there was no way out which is why he was the Joker. He's the same guy laughing hideously in the mirror at the end of the hall with no exit and of course in the mirror he's grown to monstrous proportions and it seems as if he's been run over by a steam roller or has been liquified, his eyes growing like the worst Guernica nightmare, his face stretched to the mirror frame and even beyond out onto the floor and up the walls like noon's darkest shadow.

The Thief of course is the same guy. No reason to get excited, let us not talk falsely, except it's the Thief speaking, but then again he and the joker both know to live outside the law you must be honest.

It's neither the Joker nor the Thief that I'm really talking about, but the joke. That mirror at the end of the doorless hallway joke. Back in my travelling days, there was a maxim: Stay out of the bathroom, you'll get hung up for hours and whatever you do, don't look in the mirror. And like most maxims of the high road, it was not only true, but deadly accurate. See, the thing about the bathroom was water. Ever see a cat sit by a sink with a slow, leaky faucet. A cat will watch that faucet drip for hours. It will look under the faucet drying to figure out where that drip is coming from. It will stick it's paw under it even though cats don't like water. See the thing is when you're travelling that high road, you go to wash your hands but they never seem to get clean, so you keep washing and washing, but it doesn't do any good. Then you look in the mirror and no matter what, the hideously grinning Joker is always staring back. No way out. No reason to get excited.

Woke up too early this morning. Way too early, but too late for the all night movie to put me back to sleep. And so I left the parlor and went to bed to the room that blocks out the light, but the Joker was there waiting, hiding in the bedsheets. The old I told you so Joker. The one who's just around the corner or down around the bend. The one George Jones sang about when he said, "Sometimes you just can't win." You see all year I have the suspicion something's not right. Not feeling good, don't know why, can't figure it out and it don't go away. But it's a strange thing, can't put my finger on it. And then I notice one day my stomach is growing and my pants down fit, but I haven't put on weight or enough weight to justify this. So after pondering this for a while, I finally go to the doctor and sure enough this is really happening. So they give me tests. And I see this woman who gives me one of the tests and she tells me this is called lipodystrophy and it is weight redistribution. And so I go okay, what now. And then they give a test for testosterone and like I should be really suspicious, but I'm not. But the next night after a shower, I suddenly notice my upper arms are real thin all of a sudden, real thin. And like my mind is turning into one very hot pancake in the middle of a flip. And the more that pancake flips the more I think why wasn't I told about this. Well the answer may be no one knew. But they certainly know now. And then this morning when I couldn't sleep I made the mistake of opening this magazine they have at the clinic and there it is, not once but at least twice: "The long-term side effects of protease inhibitors are becoming clearer: fat redistribution from the face, arms and legs to the abdomen, breasts and/or upper back; increased sugar levels which can lead to diabetes; and

abnormally high cholesterol and triglycerides which are associated with an increased risk of heart disease.

And all I can think of is back to a year ago when I read about these drugs and was trying to make decisions and all I felt in my mind was this stuff was evil, evil evil. And I am starting to feel that way again.